



The United States Attorney's Office

Central District of California



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Thom Mrozek
Public Affairs Officer

(213) 894-6947
thom.mrozek@usdoj.gov

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ORANGE COUNTY MEN INDICTED ON FEDERAL CHARGES OF SMUGGLING BIRDS FROM VIETNAM INTO U.S.

A federal grand jury in Los Angeles today indicted two Garden Grove men on charges related to the smuggling of songbirds – including one injurious species – into the United States. The birds were allegedly concealed on one man's body during at least one trip on a commercial flight from Vietnam.

Duc Le, 34, and Sony Dong, 46, were named today in an eight-count indictment that charges both men with conspiracy. Le additionally is charged with making a false statement to the United States Fish & Wildlife Service. Dong additionally is charged with three counts of illegally importing wildlife and three counts of importing goods by means of false statement.

Both men were arrested last month following an investigation by the United States Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) after investigators discovered that Dong had 14 live birds strapped to his legs; according to court documents. A subsequent search warrant executed at Le's residence uncovered 51 additional songbirds and numerous cages. All the birds seized are currently in quarantine.

The investigation started in mid-December when officials with Customs and Border Protection (CBP) at Los Angeles International Airport discovered abandoned luggage that contained 18 birds, five of which were dead. Officials determined that Dong had checked the luggage while boarding a flight in Vietnam.

According to court documents, about one month ago, CBP determined that Dong had flown to Vietnam and was scheduled to return on April 13. After Dong arrived at LAX as scheduled, CBP conducted a secondary inspection of Dong and found bird feathers and droppings on his socks, as well as birds' tail feathers visible under his pants. After he was transported to a quarantine area, USFWS agents searched Dong and discovered 14 live birds attached to two flat pieces of cloth that were wrapped around his calves. The birds included three red-whiskered bul-buls (which is listed as an injurious species under federal law), four magpie robins and six shama thrush.

After linking Le to Dong's activities, investigators executed a search warrant at Le's residence and found an outdoor aviary consisting of approximately 70 large bird cages that contained 51 Asian songbirds, according to court documents.

Federal law prohibits the importation of certain injurious birds into the United States without a permit. Federal law also requires that all wildlife, including birds, be declared to CBP at the port of first arrival in the United States.

If convicted of the charges contained in the indictment, Le faces a statutory maximum sentence of 26 years in federal prison, and Dong faces a statutory maximum sentence of 10 years in prison.

An indictment contains allegations that a defendant has committed a crime. Every defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.

After being arrested by federal authorities last month, both men were released on bond. Le is scheduled to be arraigned on the indictment on Monday, and Dong is scheduled to be arraigned on May 18.

This case is the product of an investigation by the United States Fish & Wildlife Service and Customs and Border Protection.

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